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ABSTRACT

This report was undertaken to help the Tennessee State government comply with federal requirements that all states collect valid, reliable, and uniform data for programs receiving federal funds as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) adult education programs. Data must be collected to report learner gains in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, along with additional skills related to workforce assessment. Two assessment instruments were considered: the Oral Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the CASAS. The Oral BEST is designed for adult ESL learners at the survival and pre-employment skills level. It uses real life materials and tasks to measure performance of basic language competencies. The CASAS is an older test, and is already well-established and accepted as a valid and reliable assessment tool. For reasons provided in detail, it is concluded that the Oral BEST test would be the better choice by the Tennessee state government to use in fulfillment of federal requirements. (Included in this document are various letters, summary sheets, and memoranda expressing opinions about one or both of these assessment tools.) (KFT)

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ED 442 305

ESOL ACTION RESEARCH ASSESSMENT PILOTING PROJECT 1999-2000

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ESOL Assessment Action Research Report
Center for Literacy Studies
The University of Tennessee
March 2, 2000

During the program year 1999-2000, seven ESOL Peer Trainers; Pat Sawyer, ESOL Coordinator; and Dr.Connie White, Associate Director at the Center for Literacy Studies, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville; took part in a program incentive grant. Their goal was to try out various ESOL assessment instruments, to draw conclusions from this research, and to assist the Center for Literacy Studies in writing a report, including recommendations, about ESOL assessment. This work was suggested by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education. Hope Lancaster, Program Manager, provided assistance.

As the U.S. Department of Education has mandated a uniform outcome-based reporting system that requires that all states collect data for programs funded under Adult Education, the assessments which determine these outcomes must be "valid and reliable". They must be in the form of standardized tests or other means that meet these requirements in order to report learner gains in reading, writing, speaking and listening, along with additional skills related to workforce assessment.

Two assessment instruments, the Oral BEST and the CASAS were chosen for the piloting as they were mentioned in the NRS report as ESOL standardized tests that would be acceptable to determine participants' functioning level.

The BEST, developed by language testing professionals at the Center for Applied Linguistics, is a measurement tool designed for adult ESL learners at the survival and pre-employment skills level. The BEST uses real life materials and tasks to measure performance of basic language competencies. The CASAS was begun in 1980 through a partnership of the California Department of Education and a consortium of adult education agencies in California. This test has been approved and validated by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor and meets the mandates of 1998 Workforce Investment Act.

Current practice and theory seem to recommend using a combination of commercially available and program-developed alternative assessment instruments. We believe that the first principle in constructing an assessment system is that one should always, "do no harm". Keeping that in mind, we recommend the following assessment instruments and practices which will give clearly stated criteria for a) entrance to placement in the program, b) progress within the program and c) exit to the mainstream English curriculum.

We recommend that Tennessee Adult Education ESOL programs adopt the Oral Best to meet the NRS requirements and that the literacy section of the test also be used for

reading and writing assessments. (The NRS is in the process of adopting the literacy section of the BEST.) We also recommend that all ESOL teachers receive training in administering the BEST. This training can be done at the ESOL Institute, TAACE, and regional meetings using a module developed by the Center for Literacy Studies.

History of the Assessment Process

At an Adult Education Supervisor's meeting in 1998, Tennessee Adult Education Supervisors requested that the Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee,assist the state in developing an ESL assessment process through program incentive grants. It was decided that the work should be done with a group of ESOL practitioners in an incentive grant process which would identify an assessment process for ESOL learners,incorporate the process into the state plan, produce training materials and work with the state office to provide training in the assessment process.

At the same time, it was decided to develop an ESOL Peer Trainers' Network made up of a group of exemplary ESOL instructors who were willing to lend support to other ESOL teachers and provide leadership and training regarding teaching ESOL and work-related basic skills. These Peer Trainers were then asked to apply for an ESOL Program Incentive Grant to try out assessment instruments in her/his classroom with materials provided by the Center for Literacy Studies. Those grant recipients were to document the results two times per month on the ESOL listserv, attend a meeting to draw conclusions from the research and assist the Center for Literacy Studies in writing a report, including recommendations, about ESOL assessment.

The CASAS and the Oral BEST were selected as the tests to pilot. The first order of business was to order materials for each Peer Trainer and to arrange for training by a certified CASAS trainer.(To purchase CASAS material, one must first be trained in administering their tests.) The group then met in Nashville for a day of excellent training by a CASAS trainer and left the session feeling very positive about the CASAS program. Five Peer Trainers chose to pilot the CASAS Life Skills ESL program because they were interested in the fact that all CASAS assessment is linked to competencies and instructional materials that focus on learners' goals.

As previously stated, ESOL grant recipients were to document their findings two times per month on the listserv. The following section of this paper will be devoted to various excerpts from the Peer Trainers' listserv comments.

Peer Trainers' Listserv Comments

The first Peer Trainer to report on the listserv was Ellen Bourne. Ellen is an ESOL teacher in Nashville, Tennessee who after teaching ESOL for five years, decided to return to

school for her Master's in Education. Before becoming and ESOL teacher, Ellen was a freelance writer for ten years.

Ellen had chosen to pilot the CASAS and her first report was to inform everybody on the listserv that CASAS is not simply a test for placement. "...but a system to assess, place, instruct, and tract students." She continued by writing that "CASAS also provides accountability for the funding sources about how well teachers are teaching and how well students are learning with its pre and post tests."

After explaining the CASAS's testing process, Ellen wrote a few of her own observations.
1. The test is culturally biased, at least in the use of names, none of which indicated any other nationality (Ed Smith, Ronnie Smith, etc.).

2. I tried to test all of the students at once, but of course, this was impossible. (Even though I called the students to remind them to be sure to be there, some didn't show on the testing day.)

3. Since the test must be proctored, it really messes up your teaching schedule (1 and 1/2 hour classes) to be testing one set of students for such a long time when the others have already taken the test.

4. Some students were mildly annoyed that we took this kind of time on the tests even though I explained the need and use of the results.

5. At one site where I teach, we have the luxury of a "tester" who tests and brings the student to the proper level. I can't imagine teachers being able to spend this time with every student in an open enrollment situation without a "tester".

A few days later, Heather Nicely, an ESOL teacher in the Kingsport, Tennessee adult education program sent a report via the listserv. Heather is an experienced ESOL teacher who has worked as a teacher and also as an Adult Education Supervisor. She discussed her program and how she was progressing in her assessment piloting program. She also noted that "Yes, this testing business is cumbersome, but will be required soon to document via tests the levels of our students and the progress they make.

Again, a comment was made concerning the time assessment takes in our ESOL classes. Heather wrote, "Let's put our heads together to come up with a solution that may free trained ESOL teachers (We are a rare breed!!) to do what they do best--TEACH."

From the beginning of this action research project, the problem of how to test an ESOL class without losing our students was a common theme. One of our Peer Trainers said that the third time she tested, she had only three of the original group of students who had started with her.
As all adult ESOL teachers know, our students have a limited amount of time to spend in class and they expect that time to be worthwhile.

The next concern that was addressed was CASAS's use of the "bubble sheet".

Sandra Fugate, an experienced ESOL Peer Trainer who teaches in Claiborne County wrote the following. "I attempted to test two of my students with the CASAS Appraisal. They had never seen a bubble sheet. The appraisal said that if they had trouble filling out items 1-5, to discontinue testing and try assessing with another form. I pursued a couple of pages of the Listening test. They could not keep up with the tape. These two students went to the 4th grade in Mexico. They were discouraged and so was I." I am undecided about CASAS at this point."

After receiving this message, Ellen replied, "I suggest that you spend a considerable time preparing levels below advanced to take this type of test. Most of my intermediate students have not been to college and have no facility with filling out a bubble sheet. Because the students were upset with the testing process, I gave them a page with lots of different facial expressions on it and asked them to circle the way they felt when they took the test. We talked about how frightened we can become when we take a "test", but I reminded them that they all took a test when they were placed in the program and this was a similar test, etc. We also talked about how we don't like change, but a change in the type of test we take is coming next fall. Teachers and students alike will have to change...anyway, I felt better about it all after we talked as a class."

Another common theme running through these reports about the CASAS was how uncomfortable the ESOL students were when taking the tests.

Diane Cohn, a Peer Trainer from Franklin, Tennessee, who teaches ESOL and is also involved in a pilot program with McDonalds restaurants wrote, "For the writing part of the assessment, most students got so nervous listening to it that they didn't know what they were supposed to write. When they were being tested on the reading part of the test, those that have had very few years of formal schooling or none at all felt very depressed and inadequate. Several students just quit listening and put their pencils down. Our fear is that students will feel so badly about themselves after an assessment that they will give up and not return to class.

One Peer Trainer, Anne Pittman, from Memphis, TN, was able to select 10 students and isolate this group from the rest of the ESOL students for testing purposes. Anne's experience was positive. Her comments are as follows.

"The students who have been in my class are actually rather excited by the process and feel that they are participating in a bit of Tennessee history. All in all the students and I liked the CASAS very much and (once we got the "door closed" on the incredible busyness of our Memphis program) are really enjoying the process of our assessment pioneering. I also want to comment on how easy these tests were to grade. For those who haven't seen the CASAS assessment's grading sheets, they come in a sealed format such as those that come in the mail with a notice that one's Tennessee license plate renewal is due. The students respond on the outside and then the perforations are torn open and their bubbled responses are immediately revealed to be correct or not. It is my all time favorite grader-friendly format."

At a later time, Anne's response was, "My group is now wearying of the testing process. In spite of great promises of dedication through March 2, my attendance was way down last night. This, of course, could have been serendipitous, but I don't think so."

* * * * * * *

Along with our own Tennessee Listserv, we have been monitoring the NIFL listserv and talking with teachers and supervisors from other states. One comment from a Special Populations Coordinator from another state was, "...our teachers just got training on the CASAS in January so I don't have a lot of feedback yet, In training, they were not too enthusiastic about the bubble sheets (thought it might be hard to train ESL students to use them efficiently). Personally, I think the "oral interview" and the "writing" (dictation) pieces on the CASAS are a joke. The listening test is really a reading and listening test.

The Peer Trainers who were piloting the CASAS assessments felt that they were ready to complete the project by the time we all met March 2, 2000 in Nashville. None of them, at this time, knew what final decision our group would make because even though they had been communicating about the assessment project on the listserv, they were waiting to hear from the two Peer Trainers who had piloted the BEST.

Cindy Barnett, our ESOL Peer Trainer from Henry County, Tennessee, was the first to report on her experiences with the BEST. In several of Cindy's listserv messages and at our meeting in Nashville, Cindy emphasized the importance of training for the person who would be administering the BEST. Some of Cindy's comments are as follows.

1. "The BEST manual emphasizes the importance of the examiners becoming thoroughly familiar with the procedures and scoring rules, especially for the oral section. It is recommended that one practice giving the test to colleagues or volunteer students. The

more you use this test, the more comfortable you become with it." **(The Center for Applied Linguistics distributes a training video which was developed by Clackamas Community College in Oregon City, Oregon. This training video can be used with the BEST Oral Interview Short Form.)**

2. My overall impression after giving the BEST to 10 students is that it's a very good test. Once you become familiar with the questions and the scoring, it's not too hard or time-consuming to give.

3. There are two forms of BEST available, B and C so you would use one for the pre-and one for the post-test.

4.**The BEST would be excellent for placing new students. It can also be used to provide diagnostic feedback. For example, my student who didn't score well on the handling money questions was proficient at telling time. Many others had some trouble following directions on a map.**

5. Many of my students were smiling as they finished the test and said it wasn't as hard as they thought it would be and they felt they had done well. The student who really gushed about it happened to be the one who scored the lowest. The Oral BEST seems to make the students feel good about what they CAN do and doesn't focus on what they can't."

Connie Mayes, an experienced ESOL Peer Trainer from Sevier County agreed with Cindy Connie wrote the following in her listserv reports.

"I too think the BEST tests what we need to know and it only takes about 15 minutes. Students don't seem to mind it. I have also given this test to some of my advanced students and have seen interesting results. Since correct grammar is essential to getting the top score, I have been finding deficient areas in some students. It has also been an eye-opener for them.

All in all, I am pleased with it. I make notes as I give the test and use that information with the scores so I can determine what I need to teach. So far in my testing, the student's scores match my observations of my students. I ask new students to come in for a private interview ahead of their first class so I can evaluate them.
I like it because it does not disrupt my class and it is SHORT."

Final phase of the ESOL Action Research Project

On March 2, 2000, we met once again in Nashville, TN to write our report, including recommendations, about ESOL assessment. Each Peer Trainer had prepared a written report of her research (see Appendix B) which she read to the group. After the reports were read, questions and answers were given and then the pros and cons of each test were written on large sheets of paper which were placed on the walls of the meeting room. These comments were read and studied by everyone. They are as follows.

CASAS Pros

Good customer service
cross-referenced materials on what to use once students are assessed
class profile is helpful for instructor's planning
a well organized system that works for teachers and administrators
the levels are useful for accountability
accurate for literacy (reading)
adequately tests listening and reading
the manual gives LOTS of information

CASAS Cons

does not test writing and product
time, time, time--takes too much time to administer
too costly
may intimidate or chase off students
leaves us with a feeling of "surely there is something better"
may not be user friendly (difficult for students to take)
Caucasian cultural bias

BEST Pros

relatively inexpensive
not intimidating to students
students feel good about taking it
easy to score
short, oral and literacy together is 1 hour and 15 min.
literacy test can be taken on own

literacy test is short and tests life skills
has a grammar section
students can see relevance of test
is even helpful for non-readers
was developed for ESOL students

BEST Cons

can not discriminate among highest levels
has to be given one-on-one
must be teacher administered, not appropriate for volunteers to give unless a volunteer is highly trained
some questions about BEST's definition of "fluency"
scoring is subjective unless teacher is thoroughly familiar with the test.

During our discussions of these pros and cons, Diane Cohn mentioned that she had been giving the literacy section of the BEST to her students. She was very enthusiastic about this experience and had many positive things to say about the test. She had chosen to pilot the CASAS and was, we thought, in the enviable position of being able to compare the two instruments.

The Final Decision

After reading reports from other states, discussing the pros and cons of our own research, and then again remembering our first principle to "first do no harm", we decided to recommend the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) as the most appropriate assessment for adult ESOL programs in Tennessee.

The BEST will work as an excellent test for ESOL students at all 6 levels. It will NOT be effective though, as an exit test at the ESOL Advanced Level. Therefore, we are recommending the following test to be used as an exit test for the ESOL Advanced Level.

TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education)
Level M, Form 7 and 8
Reading Test. (See Appendix D for address and information.)

Final Comment

My thanks to the excellent work done by the ESOL Peer Trainers of Tennessee and the wonderful assistance of Dr. Connie White at the Center for Literacy Studies, The University of Tennessee and Hope Lancaster, Project Manager, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education.
We join together in wishing our ESOL adult education teachers success in testing.
Pat Sawyer
Center for Literacy Studies
The University of Tennessee

APPENDIX A

START UP KIT (with training video) IS $200.00

Basic English Skills Test
Center for Applied Linguistics
4646 40th Street NW
Washington DC 20016-1859

contact:

Laurel Winston
Tel 202-362-0700
FAX 202-362-3740
e-mail laurel@cal.org

TRAINING FOR TENNESSEE ESOL TEACHERS IN THE USE OF THE BEST WILL BE GIVEN AT THE ESOL SUMMER INSTITUTE ON JUNE 20, 2000.

APPENDIX B

PEER TRAINERS' REPORTS

Testing the CASAS

Ellen Bourne

Program tested: Non-intensive ESOL classes, day classes two days a week, three hours of instruction per day (two teachers, 1 1/2 hours per teacher); non-defined curriculum. Students drawn mostly from the Vanderbilt University area, Nashville; very few are employed; conversation/communication the traditional goal of instruction; open enrollment

Stated purpose:
assessment, instruction, accountability (life skills) through use of appraisal, pre and post tests; program must teach skills that are tested if to be used for accountability (depends on program/test fit, in other words); originally designed for ABE students

Numbers and levels tested:
7 intermediate students took the ESL Appraisal Form #20. (Languages represented = Ukrainian, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish,Russian,Chinese,) Four others took either the listening,or the reading appraisal tests

6 advanced students took the ESL Appraisal Form #20 and were pretested on Form #37. (Languages represented = Turkish, Korean and Chinese.) Seven other students took all or parts of the appraisal test, (they weren't given on the same day.) but no pretest (Languages represented = Korean, Japanese, Italian.)

Students took the listening and reading and writing appraisal tests. I did not administer the oral test.

Administration:

	Appraisal
Listening	25 minutes
Reading	30 minutes
Writing	5 minutes

Administration:

	Pretest
reading	approximately 60 minutes

Cultural Issues:

Content/Format	pictures universal
Language bias:	some bias in that no students referred to in the articles for testing have non-Anglo names; vocabulary pretty stiff for an appraisal for all levels: convenience, combination, hazardous, released, irritant, internal.
Task bias:	mass of personal identification information required on appraisal sheet overwhelming for intermediates; confusing to have other

information on the sheet that students do not fill out ("placement into program"; "Agency"; "Class"; etc.); use of bubble answer sheet a new concept and difficult concept for intermediates; Use of medical form that they do not fill out but rather answer questions about confusing for some.

Range/breadth of content:

Age	adult
Language type	basic skills; life skills, employability
Language domains	broad coverage and depth
Language skills	four basic skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening

Documentation/manuals:

Interpretive	wealth of information available from the training session. All materials listed below were obtained from the training session. skill level descriptors for ABE; raw to scaled score conversion tables; competency coding system; competency lists; thorough administration information; individual student profiles showing test content by item; instructional materials guide (listing textbook and publisher) and more.

Comments: If we are to use this assessment we must take into account that needs and goals for different sites, times and locations around the state are different. One site where I caters to wives and husbands of Vanderbilt postgrad students who will never work in this country. The advanced levels are quite high and these students could easily take graduate work (many are professionals, doctors, lawyers, etc.), but opt for our free program instead of paying tuition at the universities. These students have no trouble with the CASAS.

But for other levels below advanced or high intermediate teachers would have to teach test-taking techniques: how to prepare emotionally for test taking; how to follow directions; how to use bubble answer sheets; how to take a test without using a dictionary; how to read for content, i.e. most important information/sentence in an article.

I also think that we will begin teaching to the test, rather than to the other needs students may have, if we are to post-test with the same test.

I think this is a fair and accurate test for advanced level students and perhaps for the beginning levels with their mostly pictorial type of test, but the middle levels seem to fall

through the cracks in terms of the issues above and in terms of vocabulary for the appraisal test.

Recommendations: The test is too time consuming. Perhaps volunteers could be trained to test students, however, since it is difficult to predict when new students will appear, this method of test administration might prove hard to manage. Teachers could be trained to administer the test, but most of them are too busy teaching to spend a lot of time assessing (unless, of course, they are convinced that the test contains all the learning they want for their students). Trying to corral students for this lengthy test while the rest of the class is in session seems counterproductive.

Perhaps we could use the BEST for lower levels and break out the CASAS for the upper levels. Alternatively, perhaps neither instrument should be used for placement but rather as a starting point for progress after the class is established and as a post test.

Teachers need to be familiarized with the test and its contents and with the process for answering (use of answering sheet). The emphasis must be changed from a communications (oral) competency to a literacy competency.

Scoring:

Of 11 advanced students who took the appraisal all had raw scores of 17 or higher (out of 20 questions) that translated to a scaled score of 227. This put them into pretest 37 and 38 post test. Scores on the pretest ranged from 25 to 38 out of 40 questions.

Of 8 intermediate students who took the appraisal, raw scores ranged from 13 to 3 (out of 20 questions). Four students had a raw score of 13 (scaled score = 218 = form 35); 1 student had a raw score of 12 (scaled score of 216 = form 35, also); 1 student had a raw score of 10 and a scaled score of 211 (= form 33); 1 student had a raw score of 8 and a scaled score of 206 (= form 33, also); 1 student had a raw score of 3 and a scaled score of 194 (= form 31). This class had wide discrepancies in the listening portion of the appraisal instrument as well.

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CASAS Assessment
Diane Cohn
Williamson County

To evaluate the CASAS Assessment I tried to look at the pros and cons of the instrument itself. What is so wonderful about CASAS is the fact that there are so many levels. A beginning student in particular can show a lot of progress, which is good in the age of accountability. I really liked the literacy level tests, forms 27 and 28. All of the students who took that test felt good about what they knew. This is so crucial at this level and I don't think we've really had a good instrument at this level before. Another good factor is the Appraisal answer sheets are very easy to grade. Any time saving factor is truly appreciated by the teacher. Perhaps the best factor about the CASAS it the fact that it tests Reading, Writing, and Oral comprehension. This is crucial in trying to understand our ESL students and gives us a better over-view of their abilities. The CASAS also is so organized in helping the teacher know exactly what skills the student doesn't know and then has all these skills cross-referenced with teaching materials. That is a huge plus.

St. Thomas Hospital literacy classes in Nashville use the CASAS in their workplace assessment. They use the CASAS Workforce Learning Systems Appraisal in Reading/Math to determine if an employee is at the required levels of his/her job. If the employee does not make the required score, set by both the teacher and supervisor, they are required by management to enroll in the program for a minimum of 8 hours a month. They then retest after 12 hours of class time. The teachers in this program like the CASAS assessment because it is skill specific. They then can teach the necessary skills in the class that relate to the student's job.

Overall, I don't think that there is another test on the market that has so many levels, and at the same time, have all of the skills cross-referenced for the teacher. Both of these facts are crucial for our ESL teachers.

The Cons about the CASAS can be summarized in one word—TIME. A teacher has to give two tests to each student, one an appraisal and then follow with a reading test before the student's level can be determined. Each test takes at least an hour and a half to administer, taking into account filling out the forms and reading the directions. This is very time consuming, considering most ESL teachers teach one or two classes a week. This takes a whole week of their instructional time for assessment.

Another big problem with the CASAS for me was the administration of the test. I have had CASAS training, I read the manual at least three times and I still felt insecure about administering the test. How would the average part-time teacher feel who teaches one or two classes a week? I have several questions that I hope my esteemed colleagues can answer.

1) Do I use the reading appraisal score to determine the reading test form? If so, where in the manual tells me that?
2) How do I use the listening score in my assessment?
3) Do I give the same reading test form again as a posttest? Again, where in the manual does it tell me that?

4) How do I use the class profile? I don't understand all of the symbols and I can't find any explanations in the manual.

In one instance in particular I question the results of the CASAS. Student A took test form 31, received a 220 score, which put her into Intermediate Basic Skills level. Student B took test form 33, received a 210 score, which put her into Beginning Basic Skills. Student B functions at a higher level in class than Student A and placed higher on the Appraisal, yet her assessment is lower than Student A is. This doesn't make sense to me.

Another drawback to me about the CASAS is the recommended 60 teaching hours before one can post test. I feel this would be a nightmare in bookwork, and one would be testing and re-testing continuously.

The bottom line with the CASAS is—IS CASAS USER FRIENDLY? Can a teacher use it efficiently and find what they need to know? I keep thinking about the majority of part-time ESL teachers who teach one class at night. How would they feel about the time involved in giving the CASAS? Would they feel qualified to give it? I haven't even touched on the cost of the training. Would districts be willing to pay for CASAS training in a field that has a majority of part-time teachers that come and go? And is the CASAS an efficient assessment in a field where the teacher never has enough time? Does the assessment take away too much instructional time? Can we get the similar results by using another assessment?

What have I learned from using the CASAS? I have learned that giving this test takes a lot of class time and preparation time. Time I was happy to give, but I'm not sure the average teacher has to give. I learned that in reading how to give the test—the more I read the more confused I got. It took me several readings of the manual each time before I actually administered the test. I learned that I had to give up almost of whole week of instructional time to administer this test to my advanced group. This group only meets two days a week. I learned that when my students come to my class I want them to walk out feeling successful. I'm not sure that taking the CASAS had that effect on them. Finally, I learned that I want one instrument to assess my students when they come to class that doesn't take so much time. I'm not sure I can say that about the CASAS Assessment. As you can see, I have asked more questions than I have answered which sums up my feelings about the CASAS, Ambiguity.

STUDENT RESPONSES AFTER TAKING THE CASAS APPRAISAL

I felt this test is good for me because I think I need to get used to listen to different kinds of person, voices and speed. I hope that tape voice more clearly. I can easy listen.

I think that this test is good, very good at everybody because is much practice and I'm wanted that every months ends a test to be better. I think I need more practice because my test is not very good but I will try to studied more.

I like the tests because I need to know about who many learned and if I go well in my study.

I like the test because for me it was so hard and is very important for know how is my label and what can I do for better my English.

I like the tess but I things is a little hard for me when I was listen.

I think the test is good but Part two for me was unclear or was more difficult to understand what really wanted.

I felt it was difficult for me especially listening. This test let me know that I need to study more English. Thank you so much.

It's make me crazy. It's tape just like a telephone call. For foreigners sometime understand not only what they say but what they do (action and face). So, this is good practice, but it's hard.

I had a headache.

I think that test is needed for us (me?) twice a year. So we can know how much we learned and the parts we have to improve.

I think it wasn't a very hard test. It was a sometimes to slow for easy questions. It could go faster. I think it is good to do those test to control how much the students are learning, and it didn't made me feel bad. I think you should keep going on such tests.

I like test.

I think it is a best thing what we take a test. Because I could know how I understand my English ability. But this test is a little hard for me. I like to take a test.

REPORT ON CASAS ASSESSMENT Heather Nicely 6 March 2000

GENERAL COMMENTS:

The students who took the CASAS in the Kingsport City Schools Adult Education program were mostly adults; all were enrolled in the Adult ESOL class(es) in the Adult Basic Education program. Those taking the listening portion of the ESL Appraisal, Form 20, took it as a group, either at Lee School, Dobyns-Bennett High School, or the Kingsport Even Start program. The reading portion of the ESL Appraisal, Form 20, was mostly group administered as well. The next level of test, the reading test on Levels A-D was administered once as a group and the remainder of the time, one at a time, as the students reappeared in the ESOL class.

Things I noticed about the test included that the dictation portion was something the student either could handle or could not. Only a few students just wrote down a word or two; most either got most to all of the words or could write nothing. I did not administer the oral portion of the test, but looked it over, and came to the conclusion that it might reveal things about the English ability of a student to an experienced teacher, but would not be of much help to a beginning teacher. Most students took longer than one hour to complete the second reading test, even the fairly fluent students. That may have been a factor of their scores on the ESL Appraisal test qualifying them to take a fairly difficult next test. When we did the practice items as a group, even though I pointed out where the practice boxes were, many students marked the practice items, not in the correct box, but in the spaces for questions 1 and 2. There was a marked similarity in the scaled scores on the reading portion of the ESL Appraisal and the reading test, levels A-D. (See below for a list of names and scores.)

Student comments included wondering why a test was being given before there had been many lessons (that from a newly enrolled student.) Some said the reading portion was fairly difficult. I thanked them profusely for being "guinea pigs" for the state of Tennessee as we tried to ascertain which test would best be used for accountability in the adult education program.

A test of this type would be a burden for a single ESOL teacher handling all the needs of students from other countries. Testing would occupy a great deal of time and take away from teaching time. In the evening class situation in my program, I would have to depend on our regular testing person to do the ESOL testing so that I would be able to concentrate on the lessons in English that my students need and want.

TEST RESULTS FROM KINGSPORT CITY SCHOOLS ADULT EDUCATION ESOL PROGRAM:

Student name	ESL Appraisal Reading Score	Reading Test Score
Ursula Bonaldi*	233	241 (C)
Kyoung Ae Tate	228	235 (C)
Noella	213	223 (C)
Marilena Freitas	218	221 (C)
Antje Guempel	227	234 (C)
Jin Chul Lee	233	243 (D)
Ronaldo Godinho	233	258 (D)
Jovana Pivac***	230	231 (D)
Edmar Jaremcivc	228	243 (D)
Soon Park	190	202 (A)
Milan Pivac	211	196 (A)
Kyoung Moon Yang**	206	231 (B)
Asim Brka	204	210 (B)
Suvada Brka	201	209 (B)
Kidjana	204	203 (B)
Ji Young Lee***	209	201 (B)
Mladen Pivac***	204	203 (B)
Enrique Franco	162	191+ Pre-A
Lidia Villalpondo	209	194 (A)
Patricia Garcia	198	196 (A)
Rosalba Blancas	198	220 (B)
Maria Montes	211	215 (C)
Esmeralda Franco	216	214 (C)
Alicia Franco	224	215 (C)
Francoise Amboko	230	232 (D)

*Ursula is a beginning student in the morning class at Lee School. However, she already knows 4 other languages and is catching on to English rapidly. Her oral fluency is not nearly at the level of her ability to read in English.

**Kyoung Moon was using his electronic translation dictionary (Korean) at the beginning of the second reading test. When I became aware of that, I made him put it away. Hence, his somewhat skewed score.

***Younger students. Ji Young is 11; Jovana is 18; Mladen is 15.

Results of Action Research on the Oral BEST

The Basic English Skills Test (BEST) is a standardized, criterion-referenced test designed to test listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills at an elementary level. It is intended for use with limited-English-speaking adults for whom information on the attainment of basic functional language skills is needed. It was originally developed in 1982 as a part of the Office of Refuge Resettlement Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) Project. Two forms of the BEST are currently available from the Center for Applied Linguistics. The test results are reported in Student Performance Levels (SPLs). The BEST is designed to provide information for purposes of placement, progress, diagnostic, screening, and program evaluation.

The BEST consists of two sections: the Oral Interview Section and the Literacy Skills Section. I have not seen the Literacy Section so I can only report on my experience with the Oral Section.

The Oral BEST is an individually administered, face-to-face interview that includes a series of simulated real-life listening comprehension and speaking tasks, such as telling time, asking for and following directions, counting money to pay for items and verify change, and conversing socially at an elementary level. A reading task (completion of a short biographical data form) serves as a screening device to identify students for whom the Literacy Section may be appropriate. It takes about 15 minutes to administer.

The examiner must become thoroughly familiar with the procedures and scoring rules before administering the Oral BEST. It's also a good idea to practice giving it to colleagues or student volunteers. You must follow the instructions exactly. The specific language of the test questions to be spoken aloud by the examiner is printed in boldface. You may repeat each question only once if the student doesn't understand or asks for repetition or clarification. You may not rephrase the question.

The Oral BEST tests listening comprehension, communication (comprehensible and grammatically correct responses), and fluency. These scores are added to give the total score. It's easy to add the scores. The total is a scaled score, which is then correlated with the SPLs using the correlation chart included in the manual. An overall pronunciation score is given separately.

In using the Oral BEST to measure progress, one of the two versions available could be used for the pre-test and the other for the post-test. The manual recommends at least six to eight weeks between tests. I would probably wait 16 weeks, since my classes only meet two hours twice a week and 16 weeks would be the natural division of the school year.

I administered the Oral BEST to eleven students and soon began to feel comfortable with it. I feel it's a very good test and was made just for students like mine. It is easy to administer; it takes only 15 minutes per student. It assesses basic functional language skills. Since it is performanced-based, it can easily be tied to curriculum and instruction.

It was not an intimidating test for my students, who are in the intermediate and upper-beginning levels of ESOL. In fact, I think it made the students feel good about what they were able to do. My student who scored at the lowest SPL Level, Level 1, came away from the test all smiles saying how easy it was and how well she felt she had done on it. I think it's important that our tests not make our students feel inadequate about themselves or their abilities. The administration/scoring instructions for the Oral BEST say to make the student feel as comfortable as possible by maintaining a pleasant manner and tone of voice. "Every effort should be made to give the examinee a positive attitude towards the test. Once the test begins, the examiner should

be careful not to give any indication to the examinee as to whether an answer is right or wrong; all responses should be accepted with a smile or nod. Remember that this is a testing and not a teaching situation."

I have not been able to administer the test to my migrant farm worker students, who are in Mexico now. They are at the literacy and beginning levels. I think the Oral BEST would be quite appropriate for them. I was interested to read Heide Spruck Wrigley's, Sr. Research Associate ofr Aguirre International, entry on the NIFL-listserv, which Pat Sawyer forwarded to us on Feb. 18. She said that it can be difficult to assess progress for beginning ESOL students. She suggested choosing an assessment instrument that "captures how well students are able to communicate in spoken English (verbal proficiency)." She said the first component of an assessment framework should be oral proficiency assessments for spoken English for ESL. "The BEST seems to work for many programs."

I think it would also work for ours and I recommend it for the Tennessee adult ESOL programs.

Cindy Barnett, ESOL teacher
Henry County Adult Education
March 1, 2000

RESULTS OF BEST TEST RESEARCH

--Connie Mayes

The BEST oral test is a short test which gives a score for listening comprehension, communication, fluency, and an overall student performance level. It is easy to give and takes about 15 minutes. Students do not seem to mind taking the test.

Pros of the BEST:

1. Easy to give.
2. Easy to score.
3. Short test.
4. Results in useful information.
5. The scores are useful for placement of student.
6. Can be used for all levels of students.
7. Easy to show gains.

Cons of the BEST:

1. Tester must almost memorize the test.
2. Pictures are very dark.
3. Must be given one-on-one.
4. Recommendation of post-testing in 6 weeks.

I don't think there are a lot of cons for this test. For ESOL we need something short and simple that gets the job done. The BEST is easy and to the point. Our students often don't know what or why we are doing something, and they don't understand when we try to explain. If we spend a lot of time testing, they will simply not return to class. The recommendation of post-testing at 6-8 weeks is impractical for me, as I would be testing all the time and not teaching, and I think the students would quit coming if I do too much testing.

I have found it fairly easy to use the BEST, as I test the students when they come for their pre-class interview. Some students show up for class unannounced, and then I try to get them after class. Since the test is short, this is fairly easily accomplished.

I have tested new students and long-time students. For the most part, the results have been what I expected. Something interesting, though, is that a student who cannot read and write is able to get a high score on this test, because it is an oral test. The teacher might not want to use the test score for placement of this student. I don't consider this a problem.

RESULTS OF BEST TEST RESEARCH

--Connie Mayes

Based upon my expericence, I recommend that the state adopt the BEST test for their reporting purposes. We can easily give them the scores they want, and it should be easy to show gains with this test, as all these skills are part of our curriculum.

APPENDIX C

Heide Spruck Wrigley
Senior Research Associate
Aguirre International

"Just a couple of words of caution. If you want to pick up gains for beginning ESL students, you really will need to select an assessment that captures how well students are able to communicate in spoken English (verbal proficiency). So that will mean at least two assessments (one for verbal proficiency and another for picking up the changes in literacy skills...
In addition, if you have folks at the very lowest level, the gains they make may not show up on a standardized test so it can easily look like they have not learned much of anything when indeed they have.
My suggestion would be to develop an assessment framework that minimally combines the following:
1. For ESL: Oral proficiency assessments for spoken English for ESL (the BEST seems to work for many programs).
2. For first level literacy learners: an alternative assessment for students new to literacy that combines a demonstration of what students can do (reading and writing portfolios), student self-assessments (can-do lists, for example); and teacher assessments.
You could supplement that with a test that assesses reading "subskills".

Carol H. Van Duyzer
National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education
(In response to a question asking if the TABE could be used for ESOL students at the advanced level.)
"As far as the TABE is concerned, I think you are right to suggest that it be given to students who test at SPL 6 and above or top out of the BEST oral or the BEST literacy. Texas gives the BEST oral. If students score less than 5 on the reading and writing screening portion, they are not given the BEST literacy. Those with scores higher than 5 on the screening also take the BEST literacy. Those who top out on the BEST oral are usually moved over to the TABE."

APPENDIX D

TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education)
Level M, Form 7 and 8
Reading Test

This test was normed in 1993 and will test levels of accomplishment for students working at the 3.6 to 6.9 grade level.

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